

December

Monday

Tuesday

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Chanukkah

Winter Begins

November

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January 2005

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30	31	Christmas	Kwanzaa

December

Health Activities and Observances

To truly stem the epidemic of preventable diseases that threaten too many Americans, we need to move from a health care system that treats disease to one that avoids disease through wiser personal choices.

-Secretary Thompson

National Drunk and Drugged Driving (3D)
Prevention Month

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

National Aplastic Anemia
Awareness Week (1-7)

National Hand Washing
Awareness Week (5-11)

World AIDS Day (1)

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December

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December

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Fri 17 _____ Fri 24 _____

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Sun 19 _____ Sun 26 _____

December

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Wellness starts with... Preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Never underestimate the power of prevention, especially when it comes to the health of your reproductive system! The female reproductive system is one of the most easily infected or injured parts of the body and is at risk for recurrent or long-term problems. Taking simple steps to prevent getting or spreading sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), will pay off both for yourself and for those you love. The best way to prevent getting or spreading these diseases is to know your "ABCs." The "A" stands for "abstinence" (not having sex of any kind). Abstaining from sexual activities, including vaginal, anal, or oral sex, is the safest way to avoid STDs. The "B" is for "be faithful." Being in a sexual relationship with only one partner who is also

faithful to you limits your number of sexual partners and the possibility of infections. The "C" is for condoms. Condoms should be used for any sexual activity with a partner who has an STD, or with any partner outside of a long-term, faithful sexual relationship. Remember, if you choose not to follow A, B, or C, you could get pregnant or get an STD, even AIDS. You can feel proud knowing you are doing your best to keep both you and your partner safe and healthy for life.

Vaginal Infections and STDs

Vaginitis

No one likes to talk about vaginal itching and infections, but nearly all women have these symptoms at some point in their lives. Your vagina is the birth canal, or area that connects your cervix (the lower part of your uterus or womb) to the outside of your body. The walls of the vagina are lined with mucus membranes and tiny glands that make vaginal secretions. Vaginal irritation (vaginitis), although usually not serious, is one of the most common reasons women seek health care. You might have had some of the symptoms of vaginitis, including itching, burning, or an unusual smell or discharge. **Three treatable infections cause most vaginitis:**

- **Candidiasis (a yeast infection)** is a common infection in women caused by an overgrowth of the fungus *Candida*. It is normal to have





some yeast in your vagina, but sometimes it can overgrow because of hormonal changes in your body, such as during pregnancy, or from taking certain medications, such as antibiotics. Yeast infections are easily treated with over-the-counter antifungal creams or with prescription pills. If you have symptoms of a yeast infection, it is best to see your health care provider to tell for sure.

- **Bacterial vaginosis (BV)** is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age, which happens when the normal bacteria (germs) in the vagina get out of balance, such as from douching or from sexual contact. All women have mostly “good” and some “bad” bacteria in their vaginas. BV develops when the “bad” bacteria overgrow. Many women with BV do not have symptoms. The only way to tell for sure if you have BV is to have your health care provider test you by taking a sample of fluid from your vagina. BV is treated with a medicine that your health care provider can prescribe for you. Many women don’t get treated for BV, but it will not go away on its own. You must be treated to relieve symptoms and to prevent other problems.

- **Trichomoniasis (a STD sometimes called “Trich”)** is a very common STD in both women and men that is caused by a parasite that is passed from one person to another during sexual contact. It also can be passed through contact with damp, moist objects such as towels or wet clothing. Women are more likely than men to have symptoms. The only way to tell if you have it is through a pelvic exam and a lab test. You can be treated with a medicine called *metronidazole* (Flagyl), but it is important that both sexual partners be treated at the same time to get rid of this disease. If you aren’t treated and you are pregnant, you could give birth early or have a low birth weight baby. Recent research has linked the disease to an increased risk for infection with HIV.

STDs

STDs are less common than vaginitis but are a bigger threat to your health. Did you know that:

- STDs are the most commonly reported diseases in the United States.
- STDs can affect everyone who has sex with a person who is infected—women and men of all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and income levels.
- And many STDs have no symptoms!



Once called venereal diseases, STDs are infections or diseases that you get by having sexual contact (vaginal, anal, or oral) with someone who already has an STD. More than 20 STDs affect both women and men. STDs can be transmitted a number of ways.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), gonorrhea, chlamydia, and trichomoniasis are transmitted when infected semen or vaginal fluids contact your vagina, cervix, or the male urethra (tube inside the penis that carries urine out of the body). For genital herpes, syphilis, and human papillomavirus (HPV, genital warts), skin-to-skin contact (with sores or infected genital skin that looks normal) can be all it takes to get the disease. And remember, you even can get genital herpes, syphilis, and HPV through contact with genital areas that aren't covered by a condom.

STDs and Women

Health problems from STDs tend to be more severe and more frequent in women, in part because many STDs have no symptoms and so women do not seek care until they have serious



problems. Although some STDs can be cured, other STDs are life long (can't be cured). STDs can affect your physical health, emotional health, and quality of life. Some STDs can cause life-threatening conditions, particularly when they are not treated. **Here's what STDs can do to you:**

- increase your chances for getting infected with HIV
- cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which may lead to chronic pain, infertility (not able to have a baby), or ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in the fallopian tube instead of the uterus or womb)
- increase your chances of getting cervical cancer (a certain strain of a virus called human papillomavirus [HPV] is the major cause of cervical cancer)

If you are pregnant, having an STD can:

- cause you to go into labor early, cause your water to break early, and cause uterine infection after delivery



- hurt your baby by causing him or her to have problems like a low birth weight, eye infection, pneumonia, infection in the blood stream, birth defects, chronic liver disease, or dying in your womb

If you are pregnant, you should be screened for chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV, and syphilis so treatment can begin right away and you can avoid hurting your baby. If you are pregnant and have a vaginal infection, it also is important to get it treated right away. Don't wait!

Breastfeeding and STDs

If you are breastfeeding, talk with your health care provider about the risk of passing the STD to your baby while breastfeeding. If you have HIV, you should not breastfeed because you can pass the virus to your baby. If you have either chlamydia or gonorrhea, you can continue breastfeeding. If you have syphilis, you can continue breastfeeding if the baby does not touch the sores.

Breastfeeding mothers who have trichomoniasis should know that the disease is not dangerous to the nursing baby, but the medicine used to treat it (metronidazole or Flagyl) might be harmful to your baby. If you are prescribed a single dose, stop breastfeeding for 12 to 24 hours after you take the drug. Talk with your health care provider to see if you can take a lower dose of the drug, which can be safer for your baby.

The bottom line is that it is best to prevent infection from the start. But if caught early, most STDs can be cured. Some STDs never go away, though, and need to be managed by you and your health care provider. If left untreated, some STDs can cause long-term scarring and infertility.



HIV

HIV infection among U.S. women has greatly increased over the past decade, especially among African American and Hispanic women. HIV destroys certain kinds of blood cells, which are crucial to the normal function of our body's immune system to fight illness. Although many new drugs have been developed to help treat HIV, there is no cure for AIDS, which is caused by HIV. If you have any sexual contact (vaginal, anal, or oral) with an HIV-infected person or you use intravenous drugs, you are at high risk for HIV/AIDS. HIV is in body fluids (blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk). HIV also is in other body fluids sometimes handled by health care workers (fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord, bone joints, and around an unborn baby).

People who are infected with STDs are more likely to get HIV if exposed to it through sexual contact and also are more likely to transmit HIV. **To learn about where you can get tested for HIV, contact the CDC National AIDS Hotline at 800-342-2437 (English) or 800-344-7432 (Spanish) or 800-243-7889 (TTY).**

HIV is passed through:

- sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral) with an HIV-infected person
- sharing needles or injection equipment with an injection drug user who is infected with HIV
- HIV-infected women to babies before or during birth, or through breastfeeding after birth
- transfusions of infected blood. Since 1985 all donated blood in the United States is tested for HIV, and now the risk of getting HIV from a blood transfusion is very low. Some women planning surgery may have their own blood drawn or the blood of a relative for peace of mind if a transfusion is needed.

Symptoms of STDs

Women, more often than men, have no symptoms with STDs. Sometimes it also can take some length of time between infection and having symptoms, depending on the specific STD, such as with HIV. But even if you have no symptoms, you can still pass the infection on to another person. Talk with your health care provider about screening for STDs, especially if you have more than one sexual partner. Be seen right away if you have any

symptoms. Your health care provider will examine you and might take some tests before suggesting the best treatment for you. Most tests are quick and are not painful.

Be Honest

Be sure to tell all of your sex partners if you are diagnosed with an STD. Talking about your STD with those you have had sexual contact with is very important to their health and yours. Remember, many STDs can be cured, but you can get them again, especially if your partner is not treated.



If you are a mom of a sexually active teenager (younger than age 25), your child has about a *one in four chance* of getting an STD! Protect your family. Educate yourself and those you love on how to protect themselves from STDs.

Teens want good, solid advice on sexual issues from parents, often mothers. That means YOU are their best resource!

STD Symptoms

Here are some of the most common vaginal infections and STDs and their symptoms. It's important to remember that you can get and pass many of these diseases through different forms of sex (vaginal, anal, and oral).

STD	Symptoms
Bacterial vaginosis (BV)	Vaginal discharge that can be white, gray, or thin and have an odor. Burning or pain when urinating. Itching around the outside of the vagina. May have no symptoms.
Chlamydia	Most people have no symptoms. Thin vaginal discharge and other symptoms similar to gonorrhea. Burning when urinating. Long-term irritation may cause lower abdominal pain, inflammation of the pelvic organs, and PID.
Genital herpes	Small red bumps, blisters, or open sores on the penis, vagina, or areas close by. Vaginal discharge. Fever, headache, and muscle aches. Pain when urinating. Itching, burning, or swollen glands in genital area. Pain in legs, buttocks, or genital area. Symptoms may go away and then come back. Some people may have no symptoms.
Gonorrhea	Women often have no symptoms. Pain or burning when urinating. Yellowish and sometimes bloody vaginal discharge. Bleeding between menstrual periods. Heavy bleeding with periods. Pain when having sex.
Hepatitis B	Mild fever. Headache and muscle aches. Tiredness. Loss of appetite. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Dark-colored urine and pale bowel movements. Stomach pain. Skin and whites of eyes turning yellow (jaundice). May have no symptoms.
HIV infection and AIDS	May have no symptoms for <i>10 years or more</i> . Extreme fatigue. Rapid weight loss. Frequent low-grade fevers and night sweats. Frequent yeast infections (in the mouth). Women can have vaginal yeast infections and other STDs, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and menstrual cycle changes. Red, brown, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids.
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	Genital warts that sometimes can be hard to see. Can have no apparent symptoms. HPV is linked with a higher risk of cervical cancer.
Syphilis	In the first (primary) stage, about 10 days to six weeks after exposure: a painless sore (chancre) or many sores that will heal on their own. If not treated, infection spreads to the next stage. Secondary stage: skin rash that usually does not itch and clears on its own. Fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches, and tiredness. Latent (hidden) stage: symptoms disappear, but infection remains in body and can damage the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones, and joints. Late stage: not able to coordinate muscle movements, paralysis, numbness, gradual blindness, dementia, and possibly death.
Trichomoniasis	Yellow, green, or gray vaginal discharge (often foamy) with a strong odor. Discomfort during sex and when urinating. Irritation and itching of the genital area. Lower abdominal pain (rare).
Vaginal yeast infections	Itching, burning, and irritation of the vagina. Pain when urinating or with intercourse. Cottage cheese-looking vaginal discharge.

Steps You Can Take to Prevent STDs and HIV

- The only 100 percent effective method to prevent getting or spreading STDs or HIV is to not have any form of sex (vaginal, anal, or oral). Delaying having sex for the first time can help reduce your chances of getting an STD. Studies show that the younger people are when having sex for the first time, the more likely it is that they will get an STD. The risk of getting an STD becomes greater over time, as the number of a person's sex partners increases.
- Have a sexual relationship with one partner who doesn't have any STDs or HIV, in which you are faithful to each other (meaning that you only have sex with each other and no one else).
- If you do choose to have a sexual relationship, make sure to practice safer sex. Having safer sex means using a male or female latex condom *correctly* and *consistently*, for every sexual act. No exceptions. If you have questions about how to have safer sex, talk with a health care provider.
- Be aware that condoms don't provide complete protection against STDs and HIV—the only sure protection is abstinence (not having sex of any kind). But appropriate and consistent use of latex condoms and other barrier methods can help protect you from STDs. The use of latex condoms and dental dams (for oral sex) can help protect you from getting one or more STDs.
- Remember that, for some STDs, skin-to-skin contact (with sores or infected genital skin that looks normal) can be all it takes to get the disease.
- If needed, use *only* water-based lubricants with male and female condoms. Oil-based lubricants—such as Vaseline—may cause the condom to rip. Remember, protecting yourself from body fluids is the best way to decrease your chances of getting an STD or HIV!
- Know also that other methods of birth control, like birth control pills, shots, implants, or diaphragms, will not protect you from STDs or HIV. If you use one of these methods, be sure to also use a latex condom or dental dam (used for oral sex) correctly *every time* you have sexual contact.
- Limit your number of sexual partners. Your risk of getting an STD increases with the number of partners you have.
- Don't share needles or drug injection equipment for illegal drugs like heroin and cocaine and legal drugs like steroids and vitamins. If you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure the needles are sterile (clean).
- Learn how to talk with your sexual partner about STDs, HIV, and using condoms. It's up to you to make sure you are protected. Remember, it's YOUR body!
- Talk frankly with your health care provider and your sexual partner about any STDs to which you or your partner have been exposed or had and about any unexplained sores or discharge in the genital area. Try not to be embarrassed. Honesty is important here. If you are living with HIV, be sure to tell your partner and your health care provider.
- Have regular pelvic exams and Pap tests. Talk with your health care provider about how often you need them. Many tests for

(continued from page 158)

STDs can be done during an exam. Ask your provider to test you for STDs. Pap tests don't test for STDs, but for abnormal cervical cells (see page 131). The earlier an STD is found, the easier it is to treat. *See the screening charts on pages 16-21 for more information.*

- If you are pregnant, get screened for chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV, and syphilis. Get screened as soon as you think you may be pregnant. The longer you wait, the more harm you may be doing to your baby.
- If you are HIV positive and pregnant, you can lower the chances of giving HIV to your baby by taking a drug called AZT during pregnancy, labor, and delivery and having your baby take AZT for the first six weeks of life. Talk with your health care provider about taking AZT.
- Learn the common symptoms of STDs and HIV and how these diseases are spread. Be aware of your own body and any symptoms you might have. Seek medical help right away if you think you may have an STD or HIV. If you know people who experience the same things you do, encourage them to seek help too!
- Don't douche. Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection. This can increase your risk of getting some STDs and HIV.
- Be aware that using contraceptives that contain a product called nonoxynol-9 (N-9) may help prevent pregnancy but will not help protect you from HIV/AIDS and STDs.

For more information on preventing STDs and HIV, check out the following resources:

CDC National AIDS Hotline

Phone: 800-342-AIDS

Internet: www.cdc.gov/hiv/hivinfo/nah.htm

CDC National Prevention Information Network

Phone: 800-458-5231

Internet: www.cdcnpin.org

CDC National STD Hotline

Phone: 800-227-8922

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Internet: www.niaid.nih.gov

AIDS Info, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Phone: 800-448-0440

Internet: www.aidsinfo.nih.gov

American Social Health Association

Phone: 919-361-8400

Internet: <http://www.ashastd.org>

National Vaginitis Association

Internet: www.vaginalinfections.com

Publications:

Frequently Asked Questions about STDs

Internet: www.4woman.gov/faq/stdsgen.htm

Frequently Asked Questions about Women and HIV/AIDS

Internet: www.4woman.gov/faq/hiv-aids.htm

Frequently Asked Questions about Vaginal Yeast Infections

Internet: www.4woman.gov/faq/yeastinfect.htm